

BAYARD TAYLOR'S LETTERS.

STREET LIFE IN VENICE.

From Our Special Correspondent.

VENICE, Oct. 25, 1861.

Since I last wrote, the city seems to have recovered a little of its lost animation. A succession of dull and rather chilly days has brought many of the citizens back from the mountains, and the events in the Roman States are beginning to arouse people of all classes. From morning till night the cry of the newsboys, proclaiming their "extraordinary supplements," is heard in all the streets—the said supplements rarely containing any authentic news. I have no doubt that you know as well, every morning, what has really happened in Italy the day before, as we here, with all the journals of Florence and Venice, and the gossip of the cafés. I shall not, therefore, write of the insurrection farther than it affects the temper of the people—at least, until I move nearer the field of action.

The cholera has gone; it is true, but seems to have left behind it a dull, morbid atmosphere. I have lost a week by illness, and not one of my family has escaped the unwholesome influence. When the sun shines, it is with a sultry heat which must be avoided, while in the damp shade chillis, on the other hand. But in Venice one can not be penned in a house while he has strength to walk or sit upright in a gondola; and so I have been wandering, day by day, through the city, seeing it thoroughly by land, as I have before seen it by water. There is no house, I believe, which may not be reached on foot, but the system of canals and bridges is so irregular that the labyrinth of streets cannot be threaded without both skill and patience. In these excursions, however, there is quite as much that is picturesque and peculiarly Venetian, as in the silent, mysterious beauty which is supposed to be the chief feature of life here.

Every walk, in fact, is a series of surprises. There are only three main thoroughfares, which are neither broader nor more distinctly marked than the others, but the authorities have placed signs, either in the pavements or on the corner-houses, by which the people may know their way to the Rialto, where you can easily guess your whereabouts by noticing what quarter of the city you are in. A large proportion of the streets are barely wide enough for two persons to pass each other. There are said to have been both mules and sedan-chairs in Venice, in the olden time, but their routes must have been very limited. The street may be six, eight, or even ten feet wide for a family carriage, and the sedan-chair, swathed in dark trappings, and filled with perpetual shadow, between houses which topple together overhead. There is no place, no direction anywhere; you can neither steer by the sun nor the stars, and even a compass is of no use.

I started at random the other day, turning into the first alley which led northwards from the Riva. After two turns I found myself in a church and superb parlour on one side. The only persons to be seen were two boys, reciting offices over a furnace, on the open pavement. There was nothing at all Venetian in the scene; it might have been at Padua or Parma. After two more zigzags I passed under an arch, and found myself on a small canal, with a grand old palace on one side, and a long, low building, with a gilded dome, which I suppose to be a church, on the other. The Gothic period in front—pointed arches, and queer, twisted columns, and steps, and recesses, and all that exquisite elegance of ornament which seems lost to me.

The dark-red color of the walls harmonized charmingly with the gray of the sculptured stone, and along the basement, where the moisture had eaten away the stucco, there were green and golden statues. It was a picture, complete and beautiful, but I do not think it has ever been painted. Still advancing, at random, I came to a tall, round, half-palace, bearing a splendid Byzantine gateway, leading into a yard, which I could not understand, by a splendidly decorated fountain, and then followed, like many more out of the perpendicular, another Gothic palace, and several terraces of greenery, perched aloft like the hanging gardens of Babylon. But the narrow *fondamenta* (pier) soon ceased, and I was led into cold, winding crevices between the houses for such a length of time that I began to long for daylight. A boy carrying from a small valley, and singing, a bunch of wild flowers, and a tall, thin girl, resting by a splendid Byzantine gateway, standing alone in a mass of模様の花, and white, shaggy hair, did not remember any notices of this relic in Ruskin's work. When I looked up again the boy had disappeared, but the next turning showed me a glimmer of water between high walls, the corners of which almost touched. When I reached the extremity, there was a universal flash in the air, such as one sees in the *Luminosa* Aurora, on the north side of the city. Before me the shining surface, of the lagunes, the floating houses and towers of Murano and far away, the snowy sweep of Alpine ranges.

Nothing, of course, can surpass the views along the Grand Canal for general effect; but much of the character and most interesting architecture of Venice is scattered through the byways (or, rather, by-ways) of the city. I have mentioned only one exception of random, because it is more the exception than the rule. One cannot go amiss.

On the turn of a turn at such angles that every bridge gives an entirely new picture, with a different effect of light and shade; while the *campsas*, or open squares, vary as regularly in shape, size, and architectural surroundings. One feature, only, is common to every view—rich, glowing, and harmonious color. Verily, they only half see Venice who do not see it in the light of the sun.

The character of the streets—the life of the people in the open air whenever it is possible—is not less interesting. I should guess that the average motion generally followed is the selling of roasted pumpkins (Ruskin calls them roasted *watermelons*). They are cut in thick slices and roasted and baked, resembling pumpkin pie without the crust, and the vendors cry continually, in a piercing but melodious voice: "Oh, long beans! and then follows, cheapskate, the trade which thrives on the streets—the sale of roasted pumpkin-seeds. One boy, who sells the latter, proclaims: "Beautiful—beautiful—beautiful better than almonds!" It is astonishing what quantities of these articles are eaten by the people. Large boat loads of pumpkins continually arrive from the mainland, and the roasting, in little pots made of iron furnaces, goes on from morning to night all over the city. The *casinelli* (small game), the pumpkins, &c., both bread-and-peanuts.

In Mr. Riva's place, the trades which thrive on foreigners have driven away all others. I never cross the square (which I do half-a-dozen times every day) without at least five vendors of shell necklaces running in advance and thrusting their wares under my nose. That I have not bought, and shall not buy anything of them, makes no difference. I stop to look, for a moment, at the ever-varying crowd, and then follow, chattering, the trade which follows the sale of St. Mark's, a valet-de-pie spring-slings from behind one of the masts, crying: "Mooos!" Thre is a florina (flower-woman)—a hideous, brazen creature, whom I have felt tempted to slap. When I refuse her two withered flowers tied on a stick, she gives a whirr expressive of great contempt, and ejaculates an "Ah—er—er" worthy of Breton Spanish monk. But there are two banners to whom I am inclined to give ear. One is a Venetian. One is a halibut fellow with one leg, who simply takes off his hat and smiles; the other is a misshapen creature on the Ponte della Paglia—a spider-like abortion of a man, with a big head, no body, and long, twisted arms and legs. It is difficult to tell whether he is eight years old, or eighty. His mouth reaches from ear to ear, yet is always spread in a wide, open, gay, low-spirited, profane, saucy, air as if he were a cravat. An Adonis and lived in the Doge's Palace.

The other beggars through the city are mostly women, unnecessarily dirty and frowsy. They repel rather than attract charity, which shows that they are lazy rather than cunning. Considering that mendicity is not prohibited, the class is not large, and by no means so fierce and aggressive as Rome. The number of itinerant females of various kinds, seen on all sides, the evidence of a dislike for solid labor. This class, of course, seeks to increase the scanty profit in every possible way, and becomes dishonest. Those who have fixed occupations are more to be depended upon. The gondoliers, for example, are generally honest; the mechanics are judging from what little I have seen. In fact, this will tend to work in an evidence of character. This trait has made the Piedmontese superior to the other Italians.

Under our windows there is a puppet-show which performs day and night, not only the orthodox Polichinello, but various comedies and melo-dramas. I saw one, the other night, in which a child was restored to his parents by the action of a *magician*. The number of itinerant *velutini* (velvet girls, so-called) is also considerable. They are mostly young girls, and are very poor, but are not to be despised. They are the chief support of the *magician*.

"The development of the territory, which thus far has proved unproductive, but which is now being subjected to a further test before being abandoned. There are nearly 10 wells being drilled at various points in the territory, and the production is decreasing rapidly. This may be expected, as the wells are drilled for the express purpose of finding oil, and the oil is not to be expected in a great measure on the territory on which it is located. There is but little prospect for any large increase in the production during the next three months. The development is falling off, and the cold weather will probably retard operations on the wells which are still completed."

"There has been a decrease in the number of wells being drilled in the oil region within the past month. Several causes have led to this decrease, the principal one being the want of capital on the part of the operators. During the early part of last month new wells were started about as fast as others were completed, and for the first fifteen days the number of wells being drilled remained about the same. As the time approached, however, the price advanced in the price of oil toward the latter part of the month, the development commenced to fall off, and now the number of new wells being drilled is decreasing rapidly. This may be expected, as the wells are drilled for the express purpose of finding oil, and the oil is not to be expected in a great measure on the territory on which it is located. There is but little prospect for any large increase in the production during the next three months. The development is falling off, and the cold weather will probably retard operations on the wells which are still completed."

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but there is something in the air and manner of the people, as they are seen in the streets, which I have always liked. They are cheerful and good tempered—not so sprightly and mercurial as the Southern Indians, but with a frankness and a frankness which are generally manifested even when you refuse their applications (I except the before-mentioned *foreign*, and even when they attempt to cheat, submit to your exhibited knowledge of the matter without protest or outcry). Our landlord, here, is a model of honesty and kindly attention to our needs, and the old conductor (who might have served Titian as a model for St. Peter) takes his lawful fare with thanks. I know that the Italians show a bold side to themselves in the cause of their country, but they are not so bold as the French.

The *Iron* being the first anniversary of the arrival of the Italian troops in Venice, it was celebrated as a *festa*. The popular and voluntary part of the demonstration consisted in the hanging out of banners, which waved from almost every house—or, rather, hung drippingly from their staves in the rain. There was a review of the forces at St. Mark's Place, and a military parade, to note how many men and soldiers have improved in bearing and discipline. They looked like men capable of hard service. The commander, Mantini—a son of the Dictator, and grandson of the last Doge—was accompanied by the civil authorities of the city. I expected some expression on the part of the people in favor of the Roman insurrection, but I suppose the bad weather subdued their enthusiasm. The military authorities really took the lead in the review, and the Government, and were as non-committal as France could desire.

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To-night, however, there was a spontaneous movement among the people. The news of an uprising in Rome arrived about dark, spread rapidly through the city, and a crowd collected in the Piazza.

A number of flags made their appearance, music was played from somewhere, and the hymn of Garibaldi was the signal for cheering and note-taking at a Conference.

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